

## **GUARD STANDS ACCUSED**

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### **Body**

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When Cpl. Orlandis Lawrence of Detroit saw a rope hanging from a tree during a Michigan National Guard training exercise at Camp Grayling, he didn't know what to think at first.

"Do you get it?" asked a white sergeant.

Lawrence -- the only black member of a four-man group -- got the message.

"I was in a daze," the 42-year-old Vietnam veteran said recently. "To me, it was a warning. I didn't know what was going to happen."

Lawrence reported the incident, which occurred a year ago, to the battalion commander. A Guard investigator determined it was just a joke, so the white sergeant was not disciplined.

A year later, Lawrence says he doesn't want the case reopened because he fears retaliation.

But a committee of retired minority military members won't drop it. In a letter to the Pentagon dated June 14, the Detroit-based group complained about the incident and other racial bias in the Michigan National Guard, including complaints of discrimination by the only three full-time black officers in the Air Guard. Copies went to Gov. John Engler, the state's U.S. senators and the Departments of the Army and Air Force.

The National Guard Bureau, which oversees the Michigan Guard, is reviewing the committee's accusations, spokesman Maj. Robert Dunlap said Monday. The Guard would not disclose the number of complaints.

Maj. Gen. Gordon Stump "has done a phenomenal job in running the Guard, in attracting and promoting minorities," Engler spokesman John Truscott said Monday. Engler appointed Stump commander in 1991. "We're proud of the job he's done."

Truscott said many complaints in the past have been unsubstantiated. Stump and Maj. Jim McCrone, spokesman for the Guard, declined repeated requests to be interviewed on the committee's complaints.

"Would Jewish people consider it a joke if someone took them to a big oven or furnace, opened the door and said, 'Do you get it?' " retired Capt. Clarence Clavon, 60, of Detroit, an executive board member of the committee, said Monday. Clavon, director of special projects for Detroit schools, was the state's first full-time black officer in the Air Guard.

Erin Einhorn

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It's the second time in a year the 500-member committee has sought equal treatment for black Guard members.

In late June 1995, investigators from the National Guard Bureau in Washington spent four days in Michigan checking allegations of discrimination. They found problems, but commended the Guard leadership for their commitment to improve the situation.

#### The allegations

"The discrimination has gotten worse," retired Sgt. Maj. William Stigler said Monday. Stigler, 70, is chairman of the nonprofit Minority Active and Retired Military Improvement Committee, which he formed in 1980.

"They have to recruit minorities by law, but they're not treating them fairly," Stigler said.

Lt. Col. Lawrence Millben, the 59-year-old base commander at Selfridge Air National Guard Base near Mt. Clemens, said he was stripped of his duties for a month for no stated reason and then reinstated after he publicly complained about racism in the Guard.

Despite a National Guard directive for armories to reflect the racial makeup of their communities, the two highest-ranking full-time officers at the Light Guard Armory in Detroit are white. The two highest-paid officers at the Olympia Armory in Detroit also are white. Both armories have the highest percentage of minorities in the state.

At the Olympia Armory, an acting maintenance shop supervisor, who is black, and another minority officer were bypassed for the supervisor's job, the committee says. It went to the son of the director of full-time military positions in the Guard. The new supervisor, who is white, was transferred from Grayling. A discrimination complaint was filed, but dismissed.

The committee says minorities are bypassed for full-time, good-paying jobs.

Of the more than 20 supervisors of shops that maintain vehicles and equipment, only two are black, compared with three a year ago.

At the Light Guard Armory, a white officer was transferred from a Detroit suburb to take charge after Maj. James Sebree, who is black, took a new position at state headquarters.

"They transfer white officers into higher-paying positions in black areas, but they don't transfer black officers into white areas," Stigler said.

#### Another view

Brig. Gen. Larry Ware, the first black general in the Michigan Army Guard, said the minority committee has misrepresented what is happening.

"They don't tell the whole story," Ware said.

Ware, 55, of Troy, said the rope incident was exaggerated. He said Lawrence signed a statement saying he was satisfied with how the matter was handled.

"I think the climate on the Army side is good, not great," Ware said. "You can't hire all black people."

Ware said Stump inherited a Guard that did not have many blacks in high positions. That situation will not change until the Guard gets money for more hiring, or officers retire.

Engler spokesman Truscott said the Guard has strict experience and educational guidelines that have to be followed in the promotion process.

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The Michigan National Guard has about 13,000 troops in its Army and Air divisions. More than one of every 10 -- about 1,600 members -- are black and about 400 are other minority members. Of the Army and Air Guard's 60 highest-ranking full-time officers, only two are black. Last year, there was only one black officer.

## Fear of retribution

In its review, the National Guard Bureau found very few formal complaints of discrimination.

But the committee said black officers fear retribution from superiors. A handful of black officers often are selected to investigate racial allegations. They do not expose the discrimination because they fear for their promotions and their military careers, the minority committee said.

Capt. Charlene Harris-Shepard, director of personnel at Selfridge Air Base, said she has experienced retaliation firsthand.

Harris-Shepard, 38, of Ypsilanti filed a 14-page complaint of racial and sexual discrimination May 24 citing problems with superior officers at Selfridge.

In mid-June, she said, she received a letter notifying her she was facing discharge for working a second job with a state agency and also for discriminating against a white officer.

Harris-Shepard, who has 15 years with the Guard, 17 months as personnel director, said she had verbal permission to work part-time at night. In February, her husband died of a heart attack, leaving Harris-Shepard with six stepchildren.

Harris-Shepard said an independent military investigator from Georgia cleared her in the discrimination case, but a second state investigator did not. She was reassigned to a supply unit last week while she fights her impending dismissal.

Meanwhile, the Guard has requested more information on her discrimination allegations.

Harris-Shepard said the proposed firing "is in direct response to my complaint. It's rough when you're treated by a different set of standards."

The Guard is an armed militia that serves under the command of the governor. Its main role is to provide combat-ready forces in times of war, such as the conflict in Bosnia. With an annual state and federal budget of \$235 million, the Guard also helps in times of civil disturbances and natural disasters, and participates in community service projects.

Last year, a Free Press series called "Divisions in the Guard" reported that very few black officers rise to the top. The numbers haven't changed much, Guard spokesman McCrone confirmed Monday.

Minority members fear representation in the Air Guard may get worse. Maj. Gen. William Henderson, the first black general in the Air Guard, and Millben are set to retire within eight months.

Col. John Bradley III, who retired last year as commander of the Battle Creek Air Base, said racial conflict hurts the readiness and efficiency of the troops. It leads to constant turnover and divides people who have to work together as a unit, he said.

Bradley said he ran into roadblocks when he tried to discipline a white officer in November 1994 for making racist remarks to a black officer. Bradley, who is white, said the Guard hierarchy in Lansing took a "no hit, no foul attitude" about the incident. No complaint was filed.

The Michigan Guard needs a culture change to make minorities feel like part of the operation, said Bradley, 51, a corporate pilot in West Virginia.

"They've lost too many good people who left . . . because they didn't feel like they belonged."

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## TO SEEK HELP

National Guard members, relatives and others with specific problems can contact their elected state and federal representatives and senators or the Minority Active and Retired Military Improvement Committee, 19501 Robson, Detroit 48235. Retired Sgt. Maj. William Stigler is chairman.

Others with oversight of the Michigan National Guard include:

- \* Lt. Gen. Edward Baca, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, 2500 Army Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20310.
- \* Gov. John Engler, Olds Plaza Building, 111 S. Capitol Ave., Lansing 48933; call 1-517-335-7858, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., voice mail other times.
- \* U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, member of Armed Services Committee; 477 Michigan Ave., Room 1860, Detroit 48226; call 1-313-226-6020 anytime.

## Notes

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## Graphic

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Photo Color KIRTHMON DOZIER, Detroit Free Press

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"It's rough when you're treated by a different set of standards," says Capt. Charlene Harris-Shepard, stationed at

**Selfridge** Air Base.

Cpl. Orlandis Lawrence of Detroit complained of harassment, only to have it dismissed as a joke. A military group wants his case reopened.

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